

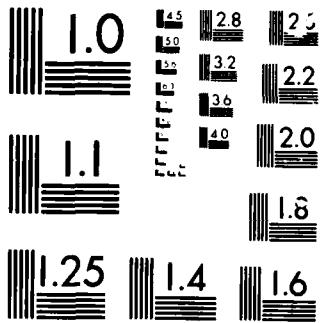
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OMAN'S ROLE IN THE STRATEGIC BALANCE

BY

COLONEL H. S. H. MAHROUKI

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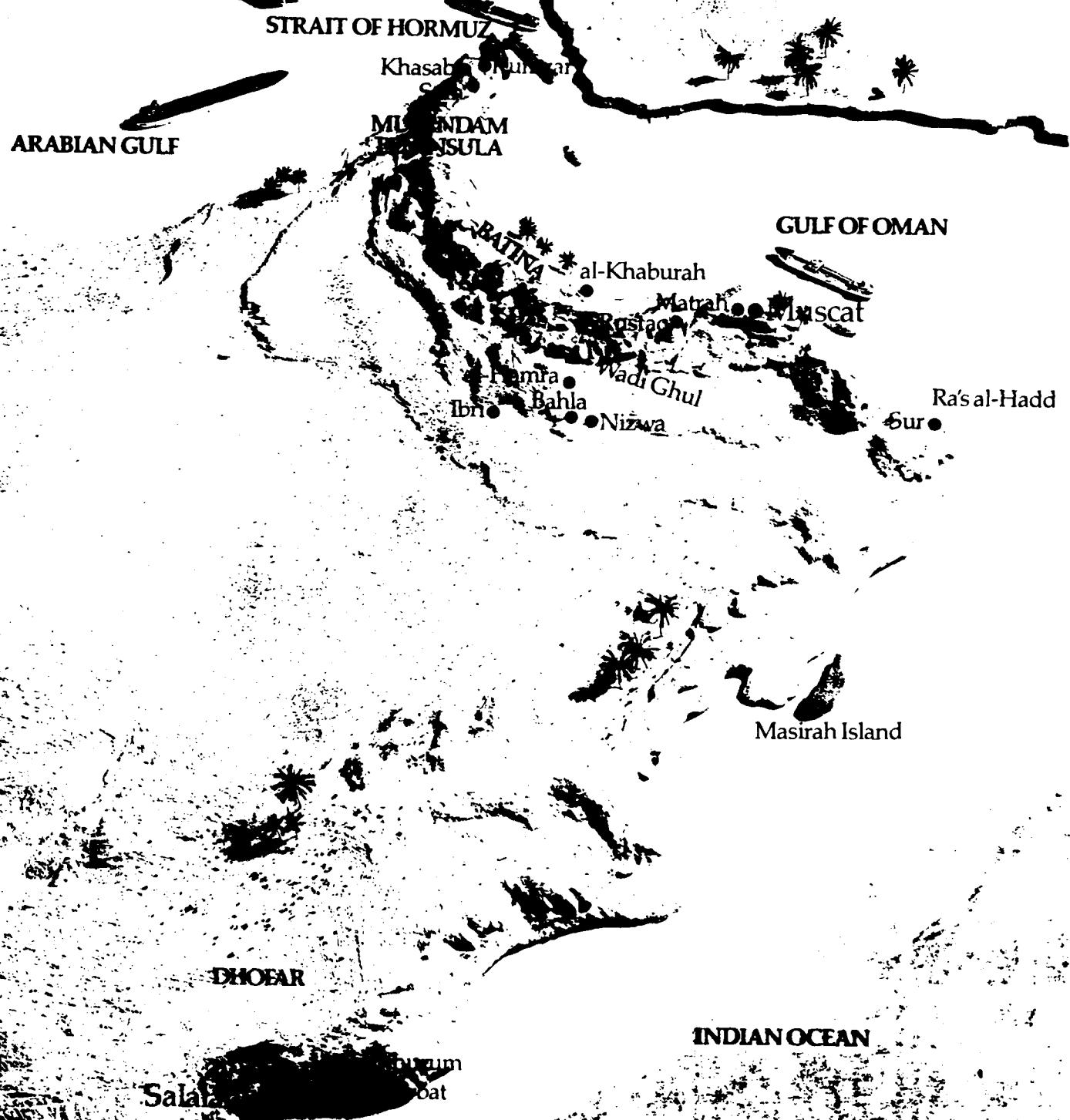
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INTRODUCTION

General: This paper is intended to cover the role of Oman in the strategic balance. Heir to a long seafaring and trading tradition (it was the ancient world's chief supplier of copper and frankincense, and its merchants pioneered the sea routes to China in the eighth century), Oman now commands the western shores of the strategic straits of Hormuz, gateway to Arabian Gulf oil, and the importation route to the Gulf states which are import dependent on almost everything but oil. Oman once ruled a medieval empire, was a major maritime power, and was the first Arab nation to send an ambassador to the United States. Oman, however, sunk into obscurity in the late 19th century partly as a result of losing its colonial interests and revenue and partly because the new western steamships easily outsailed Oman's sailing ships. Plagued by poverty and racked by internal conflicts, Oman was bypassed in the 20th century. It had, for example, just one 12-bed hospital and had diplomatic relations with only three states--until discovery of oil and Sultan Qaboos' ascent to power.

Objective: The primary objective of this paper is to discuss Oman's role in the strategic balance. However, in order to do so, it is important to cover what Oman is, where it is, why it has been forgotten, what it was, and where it is heading.

THE COUNTRY

Sultanate of Oman: Oman is the second largest country on the Arabian Peninsula, with a deep history behind it. Oman is still unknown by many people of different classes. However, to those who deal with strategic studies, the case is different. Questions like: "Is that a country?,"

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"What is Oman?," "Is that your family name?," etc., are common outside the Middle East.

Geography: Oman is located on the eastern-most portion of the Arabian Peninsula, flanked by waters of the Arabian Sea (Indian Ocean) and the Gulf on two sides, and by the empty quarter (desert) on the third side. It shares common borders with the United Arab Emirates on the north, Saudi Arabia on the west, and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen on the south. Oman has a coast line of about 1,700 miles along the Indian Ocean. It is not as barren as other parts of the Arabian Peninsula. Although it is dominated by mountains, flanked by oceans and deserts, Oman is a tapestry of constantly changing terrain: from the sandy edge of the empty quarter to the lush Salalah Plain; from the fertile terraces of Jabl al-Akhdar to the barren majesty of the mountainous Musandam Peninsula.

The mountains rise out of the sea or straight up from the flat plains. The range of mountains in northern Oman (al-Hajar) runs southward from the tip of the Musandam Peninsula to Rass al-Hadd, Oman's eastern-most point, and includes fascinating geological structures, called ophiolites--masses of volcanic rock, thrust up from an ancient ocean bed--that have been the subject of much research.

Frost, and even snow,¹ is not unknown on the spiky peaks of the al-Hajar range--which rise in places to more than 3,000 meters (about 10,000 feet above sea level). Occasional torrential rains--which, over the years, have carved deep gorges through the mountains--produce sporadic, but spectacular waterfalls, and tinge al-Hajar's slopes with vegetation. Between the al-Hajar mountains and the sea lies the Batina plain, a narrow, alluvial strip with towering date palms, orange, lime and mango trees

stretching to the shore. An arid, gravel plain dotted with stunted acacia trees lies beyond the mountains.

Southward there is a rocky plateau flanked by sandy wastes, the type of terrain that covers most of Central Oman and includes Jidet al-Harasis, where His Majesty Sultan Qaboos reintroduced the once almost-extinct Arabian oryx to the wild. The sixth-generation zoo-bred oryx have formed the world's only self-reliant herd and have proved, beyond doubt, that their natural instincts are retained.

In contrast to the rest of Oman, the Southern Region (Dhofar) catches the monsoon rains and is almost tropical; bananas, coconut, pineapples, papaya, and other tropical fruits grow in profusion on the Salalah plain. But behind Salalah, the mountains (al-Negd) pile up again, sloping gradually northwards to a gravel plateau--once noted for its fragrant frankincense--that stretches to the edge of the empty quarter, with its shifting dunes and its neighbor, Saudi Arabia. Oman occupies some 300,000 square kilometers of land on the Arabian Peninsula and, to be more specific of its location on the globe, lies between latitudes $60^{\circ}40'$ and $16^{\circ}20'$ north and longitudes $51^{\circ}50'$ and $59^{\circ}40'$ east. About two-thirds of its population is supported by agriculture which has, for centuries, been the mainstay of living.

HISTORY

Short History: Oman has deep roots in the history of Arabia. Its written history begins with the settlements of Arab tribes which came from Yemen and Najd. The area of Dhofar in the southern region of Oman was part of the civilization of the two kingdoms of Sheba and Hamiyar in Southern Arabia. The Turkish conquest of Constantinople in 1453 interrupted the

international trade routes to the Far East and forced the Europeans to seek an alternative route. This encouraged the Portuguese in the early part of the sixteenth century to move into the Indian Ocean, where they succeeded in imposing their control on the Oman coast for about a century-and-a-half.

In 1622 the Portuguese were driven out of the Straits of Hormuz, and Muscat became their stronghold in the Near East. About 1650 the Portuguese were driven out of Muscat and Oman's force grew stronger and raided Portuguese-held territories along the Indian Ocean and East African coast. By the end of the century, the Portuguese presence had been eliminated in East Africa and the Omanis took over their settlements and laid the foundation of a strong Omani territorial presence which was to endure for 250 years. Thus Oman was the first non-European power to extend its influence in Africa.

During the mid-eighteenth century Oman reached its peak. The quality of the fleet had improved, and Oman had managed to defend itself and won against Persian invasion. By the nineteenth century, Omani possessions reached beyond its fondest expectations. Omani rule included Zanzibar, parts of East Africa, Southern Persia and Baluchistan. During this time, emphasis was placed on commercial development, i.e., the clove industry introduced into Zanzibar. By the mid-nineteenth century, one-third of all government income was derived from clove plantations. Today 90 percent of the world's clove production comes from Zanzibar. It was during this time that, for the first time from the Arab States, a diplomatic representative was sent to the United States. Ahmed ben Na'aman was sent to the US in 1840 with a 312-ton ship known as Al-Sultana.² The boat anchored in New York on April 30, 1840 loaded with trade goods and presents to the then young Republic of the United States of America. A treaty of amity and commerce

was signed during this period between Oman, its colonies and the USA. A formal American Consulate was established in Oman in 1880 and closed in 1915 when Oman entered into its long sleep.

On the death of Sayyid Said (who was responsible for those developments I have just covered), the maritime empire was divided. The East African portion was ruled by one of his sons (Majid), and by his successor for Oman, his eldest son, Thumaini.³ This division coincided with a sharp and unfavorable turn in trading conditions. Oman's maritime influence, depending as it did on sail, was greatly diminished by the appearance of regular steamship services during the 1860's and by the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. Therefore, Oman was forced to remain in isolation until the discovery of oil. More importantly, however, was the leadership qualities of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said who came to power in 1970. Under his watchful guidance, Oman was ushered into a new era of development and prosperity in every field.

Religion: Oman was one of the first countries to embrace Islam voluntarily and its people were responsible for carrying the Islamic faith to many areas outside the Arabian Peninsula, such as East Africa. For many centuries, this country remained a principal bastion of the Islamic World. It is reported that the Prophet Mohamed said of the people of Oman and their acceptance of Islam: "May God bless the people of Ghubaira who believed in me without having to see me." Ghubaira, or Ghabra, was the name given to Oman in early times. Another account says that Ibn Omar related that the prophet had also said: "I know of an Arab land called Oman on the shore of the sea. Pilgrimage from that land is better than two pilgrimages from

other lands." The majority of the Omanis are of Ibadhi sect and there are a few Sunnis, particularly in the Coastal Region.

FOREIGN POLICY

Foreign Policy: Oman has always presented an outreach approach to other countries in its foreign policy, buttressing its foreign relations on these basic premises:

- (a) extension of friendship to all countries on a mutual basis;
- (b) non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries;
- (c) non-alignment with regional or superpower rivalry;
- (d) close economic alliance with other members of the Gulf Cooperation Council to achieve regional cohesion, economic and political stability and social progress;
- (e) world justice, solidarity, and non-intervention, and respect for international law.

The only nation of the peninsula to support the Camp David Accord was, and remains to be, Oman.

The Sultanate of Oman is today a pivotal point in the global strategy of the United States and the West as a whole. It occupies that role entirely of its own free will as a result of considered and measured decisions made by Sultan Qaboos and his government as to the role Oman should play in the world.

Oman's foreign policy is a delicate balance between independence and integration. Independence in thinking and in action; integration into its part of the globe. It is a policy which seeks the best for the Omani people and for the peoples of the world at large.

Several basic tenets underly the Omani approach to the rest of the world. First, its geographic position in the southeast corner of the Arabian Peninsula, overlooking the Strait of Hormuz and the entrance to the Gulf, controlling the apex of the Indian Ocean. It is an Arab country and an Islamic country. It is also a country which was never colonized, which has had friendly relations with the West for centuries, which has a genuine liking for the West, and firmly held ideas of free enterprise and free trade. It has been fortunate in finding enough oil to assure financial independence, without being in the league of the really big oil producers. Last, but not least, the modern Sultanate was born in the midst of one of the few successful efforts to put down a communist-backed guerrilla war.

All of this taken together means that Oman, its Sultan and his representatives are ready and willing to take initiatives without heeding the orders of any regional or ideological grouping. When the United States was looking for supporting points around the Indian Ocean, the Sultanate was ready to enter into an agreement--not an alliance--offering the use of its own military bases in case of emergency. At the time of the Camp David Agreement, Oman, which is a member of the Arab League, refused to join the chorus of invective heaped on President Anwar al-Sadat; it had signed the Arab League declaration at Fez in 1974 pledging to look for peace in the Middle East in any reasonable way and considered that Camp David was one possible opening. But that did not stop Oman from roundly condemning the Israeli proclamation of Jerusalem as its capital de facto and de jure, condemning the annexation of the Golan Heights and condemning the summer 1982 invasion of Lebanon.

In 1981, Oman was one of the founding members of the Gulf Cooperation Council--the group of six states on the Arab side of the Gulf--that

initiated a common market for integrated economic, development, planning and security coordination.

It was partly through the mediation of its partners in the GCC that in 1985 a constructive move was made to improve relations with South Yemen, with the signing, in October, of an agreement of rapprochement. The agreement is a statement that the two countries which share the long Arabian coastline on the Indian Ocean will seek to establish normal relations, work toward settling their border disputes, and refrain from propaganda attacks on each other, Oman granted amnesty to those of its erstwhile rebels who came home.

The basis of Omani foreign policy continues to be a carefully-balanced analysis combining enlightened self-interest, a feeling for right and wrong, with a sure sense of its own destiny. Its independence and integration are all extensions of those basic concepts.

Sentinel of the Gulf, guardian of the Strait of Hormuz, pivot of the Indian Ocean, the Sultanate of Oman occupies one of the key strategic positions of today's world.

Forty percent of the non-communist world's oil is brought out from the Persian Gulf through the Strait of Hormuz and, partially in consequence, the Indian Ocean is recognized as potentially the most explosive bit of water on earth. Oman, with over 1,700 miles of coastline stretching between the South Yemen border and the Strait--just across 24 miles of water from Iran--occupies one of the key slots in anyone's thinking about global strategy.

The Sultan of Oman and his government have been pondering that situation longer than most others. Without even considering their history--when the

Omani Empire stretched from East Africa to the Indian Coast and far up the Gulf--they were forced to do so again by the communist-backed rebellion on their southern border which lasted for a decade. In 1975, by a mixture of dogged fighting and intelligent persuasion, it became one of the very few communist-led guerrilla wars to be firmly put down. For the Omanis, the adage that eternal vigilance is the price of peace is still very apt.

The geographical conformation of the country--a long strip, usually no more than 200 miles wide from the coast inland to the South Arabian desert--has led to the concentration of strategic efforts in three principal areas: the Strait of Hormuz in the north, Masirah Island off the coast of Central Oman and, in the south, the crown of military installations fanning out from Salalah all the way to the border of South Yemen.

Oman has what is generally considered the most credible military establishment in the Arabian Peninsula. The Army is battle-tested and its 24,000 men are well-trained and competently officered. The Air Force, whose main training base on Masirah Island was taken over from the British RAF in 1977, has growing numbers of Omanis rising to command positions although it, like the Navy, still includes some 400 British officers (and non-coms), both on loan and on direct contracts. All of them are there because the Sultan wants them, has asked for them, and they are all paid out of the Sultanate's treasure; not one is imposed from outside, and moreover, most are in technical positions rather than command positions.

The Sultanate's 1985 defense spending was budgeted at \$1.9 billion, which is approximately 40 percent of total government expenditures for the year. This very hefty slice of the national budget calls for a few explanations. First of all, defense is, along with education and health, one of the few fields in the Sultanate in which the government has a

monopoly. Then, and more importantly, the military budget allows for a number of expenses that would be civilian in most countries: helicopter transport of building materials to the mountain villages in Musandam, subsidized food for the families of all soldiers, transport of health services for development workers and much of the civilian population in far-flung parts of the Sultanate.

OMAN'S CRITICAL IMPORTANCE TO THE UNITED STATES

Oman is critically important to all of the States of the Gulf region, since Oman is located at the key to the Gulf--the Straits of Hormuz. Only 24 miles across the Gulf waters lies Iran, the Iranian fundamentalist revolution; the Iran-Iraq war, and the Soviets' avenue of approach to Gulf waters through Afghanistan. The criticality to the United States and the West of Oman in terms of United States strategic interests in the region is incalculable. Although small in population, Oman's geographic position is crucial to US strategic interests in the region. To ignore the role of Oman would be folly. The French have a military proverb:

The want of a nail loses the shoe,
the loss of a shoe troubles the horse,
the horse endangers the rider,
the rider breaks rank and is lost to his comrades,
for want of a rider, the battle was lost,
for want of a battle, the army was lost,
for want of an army, the kingdom was lost;
all for want of a nail.

The critical and important geographic position of Oman has not been lost on the Soviets.

Indeed, the Soviet-Cuban-Arabian Peninsula connection has been in place since the British left Aden in 1970. Aden, once a British crown colony, renamed the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) in November 1970,

adopted a radical policy, and looked to Moscow for both military and economic assistance.⁴ Thereafter the Soviet Union acquired privileged access to the port of Aden, including docking, storage, and repair facilities, as well as necessary supplies of potable water, all necessary to Russian shipping, including the presence of submarine facilities, in the Indian Ocean. After the Soviet Union built an airstrip to accommodate its aircraft, Aden was used as a staging area for the airlift of arms to Ethiopia during the Ethiopian-Somalian war, 1977-1978.

Russian advisors have been introduced to South Yemen, control the PDRY army and are deployed in operating a force of T-54 tanks. Soviet naval presence has grown rapidly in Aden. Besides its initial use as a base for supplying Ethiopia, the port is a Russian base with a task force of four Kresta cruisers, five Krivah-class destroyers, frigates, minesweepers, surveillance vessels and support ships. Furthermore, submarine pens have been recently built on the Yemeni islands of Socatra, Kamaran and Penim, and provide a base for a force of twelve nuclear submarines.⁵

Immediately after the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen was created, Cuban armor and infantry forces (trained in Cuba by the Russian brigade) were introduced into South Yemen. Thus, with South Yemen comfortable within the Russian sphere of influence, the Soviets now have indirect control of one of the key choke points of Middle-East shipping--entrance to the Red Sea (Bab el-Mandeb), since Ethiopia, across the Red Sea to the south, is also clearly within the Russian orbit. From its warm water port and improved airport facilities in Aden, the Soviet Union can now strike out north to North Yemen and west towards Oman, thus menacing both Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf.⁶ Most likely, Oman would be their number one target; particularly when it is considered that North Yemen is increasingly

dependent on the USSR. The only obstacle between the Soviet surrogate, South Yemen (or better said, Russians' indirect move), advancing to the Persian Gulf is the Sultanate of Oman. Oman is, therefore of strategic significance to the United States since it is the crucial lynch-pin to the Persian Gulf.

Having a choke hold on the sea lines of communication through the Red Sea (with both South Yemen and Ethiopia within its sphere of influence), Russia now looks with covetous eyes towards the Persian Gulf from a position of strength. With Russian troops and staging areas now in Afghanistan, Russia now looks for control of the next strategic and critical sea lines of communication and choke point--the Strait of Hormuz and entrance to the oil-rich countries of the Persian Gulf guarded by Oman. Russian intentions are not necessarily territorial gain, but political influence and thus control of choke points crucial to the West; that is, in this case, European, Japanese and US oil lines of communications and importation lines to the Gulf States.

Fortunately, the Sultan of Oman is a 20th century leader, guiding ever so gently, his people into the 21st century. He clearly is considered a moderate in Middle-East politics and a good friend of the West. The Soviet Union clearly would welcome his early removal from power. Indeed, Soviet radio has suggested the assassination of the ruler.⁷ The Sultan of Oman favored the Egypt-Israeli Camp David Accord, is pro-Western, and is a man of moderate views. Schooled at Sandhurst (the Royal Military Academy in England), the Sultan adroitly handled a guerrilla war in the Dhofar region of Oman (adjacent to South Yemen), sponsored, encouraged, trained, equipped and paid for by South Yemen and the Soviets.

With Cuban tanks, Russian advisors and technicians (now in South Yemen), the enemies of Oman have in place the makings of action against Oman. The scenario might go something like this. South Yemen supports revolution by armed guerrillas into Southern Oman. The People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, called upon by "Arab brothers" in Oman enter South Oman with support from Cuban and Russian armor. Pre-positioned Soviet supplies located in Aden, the capital of South Yemen, lend the logistical tail to the aggressive attack into Oman from the south. Additionally, with added Soviet supplies only hours away in Afghanistan, a vice-grip approach to Oman from both north and south could be initiated. With the usual Soviet template of taking over air fields, radio stations and institutions within the targeted country, along with propaganda hype around the world, the scenario would be complete. In the US, opposition for support might go something like this: One-man rule by the Sultan is anti-democratic and an anachronism; why should the US always be supporting those in power, and opposing people's power; etc.

Oman has come a long way since the present Sultan became its head of State, and is moving in every direction to modernize health, social, education and physical facilities (roads, water and sewer) for its inhabitants.

FOREIGN RELATIONS

When, in 1980, the United States saw the need for support bases around the Indian Ocean to back its installations at Diego Garcia and as touch-down points for the projected Rapid Deployment Force, it turned for help to Oman, along with Somalia and Kenya. That summer an agreement was signed with the Sultanate that included a plan of work through 1986.

The agreement is very clear. It does not mean the establishment of American bases as that term is generally understood. The installations involved will remain absolutely under Omani control, with no American military personnel stationed on them. The agreement does stipulate that the US may have access to Omani facilities, under specific conditions, if and when that may be necessary, with Omani permission to be granted in each case. There are to be no American fighting troops stationed in or rotated through Oman. Under no circumstances will Oman be used as a rest and recreation area. The US has pledged help to improve the Omani facilities, especially for the air force, on Masirah, in Khasab near the Strait of Hormuz (where the lengthening and hardening of the runway was completed last year), near Muscat and in Thumrait near the South Yemen border. For the American share of this work, Congress has appropriated, between fiscal 1980 and fiscal 1985, some \$299.7 million. The agreement also calls for a much more broadly-based economic assistance package, including the development of water resources. Oman has twice participated in landing and desert exercises with the US, first in 1981 with "Bright Star" and again in the "Jade Tiger" exercise of late 1982.

The Omanis do not want to be part of any military alliance and they have clearly said so. However, His Majesty the Sultan and his country are firmly committed to the defense of the values of the free world; their experience with the aborted communist-supported rebellion nurtured by South Yemen and Oman's long, unbroken tradition of friendly relations with the West come together in a firmly-held conviction that owes nothing to expediency.

Rapid Deployment Force: US response to Soviet intrusion into the Gulf region has been the establishment of the US Rapid Deployment force--RDF, now

CENTCOM Central Command. Central Command, located at MacDill Air Force Base, Tampa, Florida, has as its primary mission the defense of the Gulf region, and has as its primary source of military personnel the 82nd Airborne Division stationed at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. In 1979, after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, then President Carter proclaimed the Gulf region an area of vital concern to US interests. However, the establishment of the RDF was, and continues to be, met with a great deal of skepticism by the Arab world, fearing that such a power as the RDF could not only be used against the Soviet Union, but could also be used against any Arab state which took action contrary to US interests--vis-a-vis support of Israel against an Arab state. The ability of the US to respond to a Soviet threat in the Gulf has been materially threatened by the US's inability to presently pre-position its forces and equipment in any Arab state. The US has thus been required to rely on transporting by air, all of the personnel of the 82nd Airborne Division with no forward basing whatsoever.

Pre-position support (stockpiling) has been relegated to sea-lift 82nd divisional supplies and the Near Term Prepositioning Force (NTPF) consisting of some 17 ships stationed at Diego Garcia. (These are to be replaced in 1987, by Maritime Prepositioning Ships (MPS).) One of the NTPF is stationed in the Mediterranean. Additionally, the Mid Term Prepositioning Force (MTPF) based in the Indian Ocean and Mediterranean carries sufficient armaments, munitions and supplies to support a Marine Amphibious Brigade for up to four weeks of sustained combat activity. Oman, however, has offered the use of its own military bases in case of an emergency.

The Maritime Pre-positioning Ships (MPS) program gives the Marine Corps the ability to quickly move a 12,500-man Marine brigade to a crisis area, and provides a force of combined arms, with 30 days of essential supplies,

available on call.⁸ Maritime pre-positioning embraces many of the advantages of airlift, commercial shipping, and land pre-positioning. MPS gives fleet commanders capability to control and defend key sea lanes of communication and choke points.⁹ In a recent talk, Brigadier General Edmund Looney, USMC,¹⁰ explained that the MPS could be a landward complement to fleet defenses, provide for the timely reinforcement of allies, or deny objectives to hostile forces. The Marines also have two other types of ships which can be an important part of an MPS task force, they are the new aviation logistics support ship, the TAVB, and the hospital ship, the TAH. The TAH hospital ship has 12 operating rooms and 1,000 beds, and furnishes additional life-saving support for maritime pre-positioning operations.¹¹ MPS has some 30 days of spare parts and combat supplies aboard.

THE THREAT TO OMAN

The People's Front for Liberation of Oman (PFLO) Executive Committee remains based in Yemen (Aden).¹²

North Yemen is under the shadow of the Soviet Union which is trying to isolate the country from its Western allies as well as its neighbors, Saudi Arabia in particular, by economic aid means. For example, USSR response to the aid North Yemen receives from Saudi Arabia of \$300 million and the USA of \$46 million annually, was with a billion dollar arms agreement programmed over the next half-decade.¹³

The USSR's recent action of sending Abdulfah Ismail, the former president of South Yemen (PDRY), back to Aden to rejoin the Politburo after a five-year exile in the USSR caused a civil war. Mr. Ismail, an extreme hard-liner, in the late 1970s signed a friendship treaty with the Soviets

and made South Yemen an observer member of COMECON. The Soviets' intention was clearly for Ismail to put brakes on President Ali Nasser Mohamed's policy of rapprochement with neighboring countries, in particular Oman, and others that share common borders, and other non-communist countries. Mr. Ismail died during the civil war. However, the Soviets still managed to achieve their goal of changing the President. The present President is Haydar Abu Bahr Ahas. The former President is kept in exile in Russia and as a threat to the present new President should he attempt to deviate from the Soviets intended line.

The Soviet presence in Afghanistan also poses a threat. Their ability to threaten the Strait of Hormuz through Baluchistan is great. It is believed that they have the ability to mobilize, by land, up to three divisions from Afghanistan to the Strait of Hormuz within 14 hours.

Iran's latest threat of supporting Libya (after the US strike on Libya on 15 April 1986), its condemnation of the US strike and Iran's continued use of terrorism imperils US friendly nations in the Moslem world.

Moscow's target of Baluchistan: With the Soviets' "pacification" of Afghanistan, its obvious next target would be Baluchistan, and access to the warm waters of the Persian Gulf. Access to the Persian Gulf through Baluchistan would give the Soviets muscle and leverage through presence and intimidation over the Straits of Bab el-Mandeb and the Straits of Hormuz. The Mir Besenjo faction of Pakistan's National Awami Party is friendly to Russian intentions in the region and is located on both sides of the international Iran-Pakistan border. This faction has old ties to Moscow and communism. Also, there is a cadre of an estimated 8,000 Baluchis being trained in the Soviet Union.¹⁴

Should the Soviets manage to pacify Baluchistan, then definitely their next target would be Oman, crushing Oman from two fronts (Baluchistan and South Yemen).

Today the cheapest, and commercially viable means of transportation in the world is by sea. Most of the Gulf states import at least 80 percent of their goods, including food, raw material and machinery through the Straits of Hormuz and oil is exported through the same straits. Control of this strategic waterway by the Soviets, through basing rights, intimidation, political leverage, or otherwise, would greatly affect US influence in the region including its promise to Europe and Japan to keep oil flowing through the straits, as well as the US influence on petro-dollars.

Thus far, His Majesty the Sultan and his government have, through their own good will, not imposed any kind of toll and are spending 40 percent of the national budget to keep the straits open for the world's interests and in particular the West and its allies.

CONCLUSION

Oman has, on its southern border, a well-armed and equipped Soviet surrogate, South Yemen. Both Russian and Cuban advisors are found in Yemen--advising on political structure, and training South Yemen armed forces. Cuban and Soviet presence in South Yemen was recently seen in the Soviet Union's projection of power into Ethiopia from South Yemen. The Soviets, using South Yemen as a point of departure, transported an entire Soviet division through South Yemen into Ethiopia--along with the division's end items of equipment--guns, tanks, etc. Soviet projection of power took place by flying over Iraq airspace to the Gulf waters, then to South Yemen, which was used as a staging area, to Ethiopia. The Soviets have

pre-positioned stocks of supplies and equipment in Aden, South Yemen. Thus, it was no trouble at all for them to quickly project power. Indeed, with pre-positioned supplies and equipment in South Yemen, the Soviet ability to quickly project power anywhere on the Arabian Peninsula, including Saudi Arabia and Oman, is apparent.

The only impediment to Soviet projection of power from South Yemen overland into the Gulf is the country of Oman. Letting its presence be known on the Omani southern flank, South Yemen has built up its Soviet-backed army against Oman, and has backed a small Omani revolutionary-guerrilla force intent on mischief and overthrow of the duly constituted government of the Sultan. In 1975 the Dhofar rebellion in Southern Oman was crushed. Thereafter, South Yemen reinforced its border in an attempt to intimidate Oman.

The Sultanate armed forces are limited--the army having some 20,000 troops and the navy and air force have some 2,000 personnel each.

Soviet mischief can be expected to increase in this area of the world with additional pressure applied against Oman on its southern flank.

The Sultan of Oman in May 1979, during an interview, touched upon the Russian threat as follows:

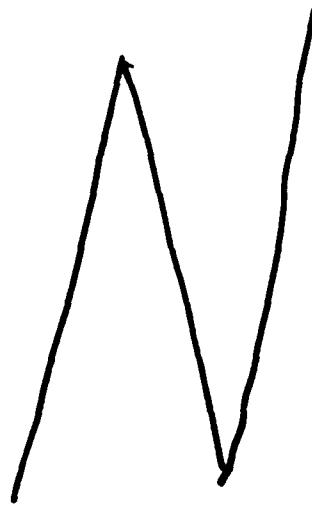
"It's no secret what the Soviets are doing. They plan to extend their influence in the Gulf. They have already gained South Yemen, which is the base for making trouble elsewhere in the area. Here in Oman we have first-hand experience with how they use people, encourage and aid troublemakers. The Russians wait for opportunities, then they jump."¹⁵

The Future for Oman: The Sultan of Oman has stated his belief that absolute monarchy is a relic of the past and that people must have a say in determining their own future. In the long run, the Sultan sees a democracy for Oman and is guiding his country toward that day. Democracy must be allowed to develop in Oman.¹⁶

ENDNOTES

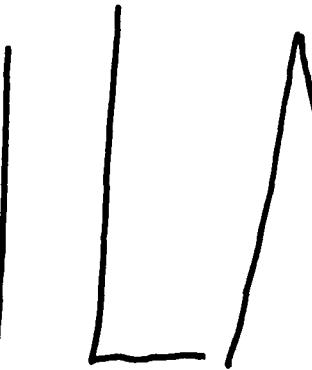
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